

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MIKE McINTYRE
U.S. REPRESENTATIVE
7TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NORTH CAROLINA
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2009**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding federal recognition for the Lumbee Indians.

Chairman Rahall, the members of the Lumbee Tribe and I appreciate your leadership, support, and persistence in the fight for Lumbee Indian federal recognition. The Lumbee Tribe has no better friend in this Congress than Nick Joe Rahall, and I know that I speak on behalf of all the Lumbee members when I say, “thank you.”

Chairman Rahall, I would like to ask unanimous consent to place into the record 3 letters from North Carolina’s only Governors over the last 32 years – Jim Hunt, James Martin, and Mike Easley. These letters show

bi-partisan support for federal recognition for the Lumbee Tribe from our state's highest official.

Mr. Chairman, over the last six years, the Lumbee Tribe and many of its members have faithfully traveled to Capitol Hill. They are now attending their sixth hearing in six years to present their strong and solid case for federal recognition by the U.S. Congress. And this does not take into account the numerous times the Congress has discussed this issue prior to this time. The Lumbees have been patient. They have been respectful. And, yes they have been persistent.

In the 110th Congress, this committee passed and the full U.S. House voted in a bi-partisan way, 256-128, to say yes to Lumbee federal recognition. The Senate Indian Affairs Committee also passed the bill but unfortunately,

the full U.S. Senate did not act on this bill. So, here we start again.

Mr. Chairman, the time has come for positive finality on this issue. The time has come for passage in the House, passage in the Senate, and signature by President Obama who has said he supports Lumbee federal recognition.

Once and for all, the time has come for discrimination to end and recognition to begin! This is the Lumbee Tribe's time!

During the past few hearings, the Lumbee Tribe has heard concerns raised about them as to whether they are "true Indians," and I am certain that it will be raised again here today.

Chairman Rahall, that question is a dagger in the heart of the good, decent, and honorable people who compose

the Lumbee Tribe! It represents a weak attempt to try and confuse the issue of federal recognition.

Mr. Chairman, the record and the facts are crystal clear – the Lumbee Tribe exists as an Indian tribe and has done so over its long history. The Department of Interior has, on several occasions, concluded that the Lumbees are a distinct Indian community. The various names by which the tribe has been known were the result of State law. In no case, except for the name Lumbee, were the names chosen by the tribe itself. All the other names were imposed upon the tribe or chosen for them! Furthermore, the BIA regulations on acknowledgement of Indian tribes specifically provide that changes in names are **not** relevant to Indian identity.

In the late 1500's, when English ships landed on the shores at Roanoke Island on the North Carolina coast, the

Englishman discovered Native Americans. Included among those Native Americans were both the Cheraw and Pee Dee Indians, who are direct ancestors of the Lumbee Indians. Later, in 1888, the Lumbees made their first effort at gaining federal recognition. For at least 500 years, Lumbee Indians have been inhabitants of this land, and for over half of the time that our country has been in existence, 121 (First petition to Congress was in 1888) of the 233 (2009-1776= 233) years, the Lumbee Indians have been seeking the recognition and respect that they deserve. As the largest tribe east of the Mississippi and the largest non-recognized tribe in America, it is unfathomable that this tribe of 55,000 people has never been fully recognized by our government.

I was born and reared in Robeson County, North Carolina, the primary home of the Lumbee people. I go home there virtually every weekend, and I have the high

honor of representing approximately 40,000 of the 55,000 Lumbees who live in my home county. In fact, there are more Lumbees in Robeson County than any other racial or ethnic group. The Lumbee Indians, many of whom are in the in the audience today, are my friends, many of whom I have known all my life. They are important to the success of everyday life in Southeastern North Carolina, and their contributions to our society are numerous and endless.

From medicine and law to business and banking, from the farms and factories to the schools and the churches, from government, military, and community service to entertainment and athletic accomplishments, the Lumbees have made tremendous contributions to our county, state, and nation. In fact, in my home county, the former sheriff, the current clerk of court, the register of deeds, the school superintendent, several county commissioners and school

board members, and the representative in the state legislature of the area where I live, as well as two of the district court judges and one of the superior court judges are all Lumbee Indians.

Mr. Chairman, those contributions are being recognized by our colleagues here in the U.S. House through their support of HR 31, legislation that I have introduced to grant the Lumbees federal recognition. I am pleased to report to the Natural Resources Committee, that 179 members of the U.S. House from both parties have co-sponsored Lumbee recognition!

Lumbee contributions are also being recognized at home by both the public and private sector. From City Councils to County Commissioners, from the Chamber of Commerce to the Southeastern Regional Medical Center -

all have endorsed the effort to grant the Lumbees federal recognition.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, let me urge this Committee, and this U.S. Congress, not to delay any more on this issue. Justice delayed is justice denied! As you will hear from the next panel, the evidence is clear, cogent, and convincing. It is time to say “yes”- yes to dignity and respect; yes to fundamental fairness; yes to decency; yes to honor; yes to federal recognition! And as I said earlier, it’s time for discrimination to end and recognition to begin!

Thanks again for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to working with you and the committee for this long over-due recognition. May God grant that justice finally be done! With your help, I am confident that it will!